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The Cryptozoology Review
Vol. 2, No. 2, Autumn 1997
Editor/Publisher: Ben S. Roesch
Associate Editor: John Moore
Contents of this Issue:
P 2. The Editor's Page
P 3. Letters and Exchange
P 4. A Compendium of Cryptids
[AD] P 6. A Review of Alleged Sea Serpent Carcasses Worldwide (Part One - 1648-1880) by Ben S. Roesch
P 28. Further Notes on Unrecognized British Mustelids by Darren Naish
P 32. End Page

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The Cryptozoology Review
Vol. 2 No. 2 Autumn 1997
The Editor's Page
I'm sure you have already noticed the new format of this issue of The Cryptozoology Review. This issue is printed
on 11x17 inch pages, which are folded and stapled along the spine. This new format gives a much more magazine-
like "feel" to TCR, and I hope you like it.
As a result of these changes, once again TCR's subscription prices have changed. The new prices for a one-year
[AD] subscription are as follows (sent by air mail and in Canadian dollars): $12.00 in Canada, $14.00 (or $US 11.00) in
the US, $16.00 (payable in American or Canadian funds) in all other countries. I hope that you think these rather
minor price changes are worth the increased production quality.
Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions, comments or criticisms you may have. Also, may I remind
you that we are always interested in recieving articles or reviews for possible publication. If you would like to join
our staff (e.g., as a news correspondent), please contact me, and we always appreciate clippings, articles etc. that
come across.
may
you
you may have noticed that the Compendium of Cryptids is quite a bit shorter this issue; some of the stories
Some of

be covered in greater detail in next issue's edition. Also, apologies for the lateness of this issue. I mentioned
have been extremely busy with other commitments, and postage of the issues was delayed because of a Canada Post
strike.
Thank you for your continuing support and I hope you enjoy this issue.
- Ben S. Roesch
Editor/Publisher: Ben S. Roesch
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On The Cover: An early drawing of the Stronsay beast, 1808.
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The Cryptozoology Review
Letters
We welcome letters on any thoughts you may have about TCR or is contents. If you do not want your comments published, then please indicate that on your letter. We may edit any letters for content and clarity.
Glowing Mamlambo
In Ben S. Roesch's discussion (in Compendium of Cryptids, TCR, vol. 2 no. 1, pp. 9-11) of the mamlambo, it is stated that no tetrapod [all vertebrates

excepting fish] is known to be bioluminescent. The Fransicana or La Plata river dolphin (Pontporia blainvillei) is bioluminescent - this is caused by a sheen of diatoms that grow over its skin (the real bioluminescent organisms in this instance).
Darren Naish
Southampton, England.
I thank Darren for this note in fact, during the writing of the segment on the mamlambo, I had wondered if the reported green glow that this creature emits might actually be the result of bioluminescent diatoms in the surrounding water. Anyone who has disturbed ocean waters at night (particularily in tropical regions) will know that the water becomes alive with "fireworks" - this is, of course, merely microscopic phytoplankton which emit green or yellow light when agitated. Possibly then, the green glow attributed to the mamlambo is really to fault to tiny diatoms either in the water or perhaps growing on the alleged animal's skin, as Darren alludes to in the case of the La Plata river dolphin. However, as far as I know there are no freshwater luminescent diatoms (the La Plata river dolphin lives in brackish estuaries), so the matter is still somewhat of a mystery. - The Editor.
Lake Van
With regard to the Lake Van Monster video, I thought the readers might be interested in a little Lake Van geology and biology.
Lake Van is the largest and deepest lake in Turkey, it's surface area is huge, 2,266 square miles, with depths up

to 1500 feet. Because it is volcanic in origin, sodium carbonate sedimentations form along it's shores and since the lake has no outflow, it has bitter, salty, carbonated waters. These waters act as a bleaching agent and will even lighten the hair on swimmers.
This composition of water precludes most life forms except seven types of seaweed, two fishes (one an eel), and 137 types of microbes. When fishing does take place, it is done exclusively where rivers and streams flow into the lake, the only place where the Lake's one non-anguilline fish, Chalcalburnus tarichi, is found.
There is one natural explanation for many of the reports. According to scientists, eruptions of deep magmatic and volcanic underground water sources, at great pressure, account for unusual surface foaming and bubbling on the lake surface, and occasionally will form small whirlpools and waves.
I'll let the readers draw their own conclusions. The 18-second video is a fascinating look-see, and if it's still available from CNN, well worth the download time.
Chris Orrick

Raleigh, North Carolina, USA.
Exchange
Send us your business card and/or samples of your publication etc. (if you have one) and we'll list you here!
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Zoology is the bimonthly newsletter of cryptozoology, published in an 8-page magazine format with illustrations. Features news of new species, rediscovered species, and evidence for still-unconfirmed animals. Also included are reviews of books, articles, and reader correspondence. Editor. Matt Bille, author of Rumors of Existence (Hancock House, 1995). For a sample issue and [AD] subscription information, please send $1 to: Exotic Zoology, 3405 Windjammer Drive, Colorado Springs, CO, 80920, USA. Email: MattWriter@AOL.com.
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The Cryptozoology Review
Vol. 2 No. 2 Autumn 1997
A Compendium of Cryptids
("All the latest cryptozoology news fit to print")
Written and Compiled by Ben S. Roesch
Notes of Various New and Rediscovered Species
-- Another new species of large mammal has been discovered in Vietnam. It is the fourth deer-like animal discovered in the southeast Asian country since 1992. The animal is called the Truong Son muntjac, or soi cacoong, meaning "the deer that lives in the deep, thick forest," and has never been seen alive (it was determined to be a new species on the basis of DNA and structural analysis of a number of skulls brought to World Wildlife Fund researchers by local hunters). A latin name has not been designated yet, as a formal scientific description as not yet appeared. The Truong Son muntjac is rather small, being only about 35 cm (14 in) high at the shoulders, and weighing a diminutive 15 kg (34 lb). Its small size is useful in navigating the dense forests where it lives, on the Troung Son mountains (hence its common name), along the border of Vietnam and Laos. It has a black coat, and very short thumbnail-length antlers. Researchers believe a live specimen will be obtained within the next four months. (On a related note, the same expedition that obtained the skulls of the Truong Son muntjac discovered four new plant species--three bamboos and a broadleaf tree.)

Sources: Edwards, Adrian. 1997. "New mammal believed alive and well in Vietnam." Reuter, August 22.

--A team of biologists from Madagascar and Conservation International has rediscovered the endemic Madagascar red owl (Tyto soumagnei), which has been thought to have been extinct since the 1930's. The team stumbled across the owl in the Zahamena Reserve while collecting data on a species inventory mission in August 1996. The owl's elusiveness is based on its rarity and the lack of detailed biological research and exploration in Madagascar.

Hopefully, Madagascar will reveal more biological secrets soon.

Source: Anon. 1997. "A Remarkable Discovery." http://www.conservation.org/web/news/nff2-4/redowl.htm.

Workmen in the Canary Islands were digging a sump for untreated sewage for a new hotel when they stumbled across water-filled caves which were discovered to be filled with numerous new lifeforms, found nowhere else on the planet. One report said more than 16 000 new species were discovered, but this seems to me like a major exaggeration. In any case, the discoveries included several new crustaceans, such as a strange shrimp-like creature (described for some equally strange reason as "the living equivalent of [A]rchaeopteryx, the first known bird"). In another recently found cave, a new class of crustacean and six species of small copepods were found. The whole account sounds very interesting, and hopefully more detailed and reliable information will surface.

Source: Anon. 1997. "New creatures are found in holiday island caves." The Electronic Telegraph, September 10.

Recent Cryptozoology News

One July 25 (1997), Deutsche Presseagentur released a note explaining that renowned mountaineer Reinhold Messner recently encountered three Yetis (presumably in the Himalayas). He apparently made the statement to the journal News (Vienna, Austria). The bombshell is that he apparently has pictures and a film of the three creatures!

According to the report, he will release more information on all of this in his new upcoming book.

Source: Coleman, Loren. 1997. Post to the Forteana Internet mailing list, August 5.

-- In 1986 a rancher in Sinaloa, Mexico shot what he thought was the legendary onza, a mysterious big cat that has been reported in the Sierra Madre Occidental region of Mexico for more than 300 years. International Society of

Cryptozoology (ISC) secretary J. Richard Greenwell teamed up with Auburn University professor Dr. Troy Best to examine the body, and found that it resembled a puma, but was more gracile (weighing 27 kg [60 lb]), had long ears, and had distinct dark horizontal stripes on the inside of its front legs. Tissue analysis suggested a puma identity, though a puma subspecies, an endemic variety, or simply a veritable "freak" born of normal puma parents were also considered. Now, I have received word from Andrew Gable (who heard of it from Mark Hall and Michel

Raynal) that
recent DNA testing on tissue from the alleged onza seems to indicate that it was, in fact, a puma. Hopefully, further
details on the results of these tests will be released soon, whether by the ISC or another source.
Sources: Gable, Andrew. 1997. Pers. comm, July 30.
-- The Beast of Gévaudan (see TCR Vol. 1 No. 3), allegedly shot in the 1700's by Jean Chastel (but never identified
because of the disappearance of its body), has been reportedly identified by French scientists. In a report (which I
have yet to see) in the September 1997 issue of Annales du Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle du Havre, Franz Jullien (a
taxidermist at the National Museum of Natural History in Paris) reveals that the stuffed remains of the Beast were
actually stored in the collections of the Museum from 1766 to 1819. The Beast was, it seems, a striped hyena
(Hyaena hyaena). While a hyena could explain many aspects of the Beast of Gévaudan's appearance and behaviour, it
is a mystery how one could be living in France during the 1700's (in fact, at any time in recent history). It is
possible, though, that it was an escaped member of one of the "travelling menageries" which may have been touring
the region during the 1700's. I will suspend further comments until I have seen Jullien's paper.
Sources: Raynal, Michel. 1997. "The Beast of Gévaudan Identified!"
http://perso.wanadoo.fr/cryptozoolnews.htm
-- On August 14, 1997, 300 inhabitants of Nueva Tacna, a small town in Peru near Iquitos, were watching a soccer
game (part of a festival going on at the time) when a huge snake-like creature (said to be a boa constrictor) tore
through a nearby patch of forest, uprooting trees and creating a huge 500 m (1640 ft) long trench in its wake. It then
disappeared into the nearby Napo River (a branch of the Amazon River). According to the five eyewitnesses that saw
the creature (all the rest of the people just "felt" it), the creature was 40 m (132 ft) long, at least 5 m (16 ft) wide,
had two antennae "the size of an elephant's trunk" on its head, and had ears 1 m (3.3 ft) long. When it appeared,
according to one eyewitness, the "earth started to shake as if it was an earthquake [and] the sky darkened." Peruvian
officials blamed the sighting on a fleet of large construction machines (however, it was later noted that the jungle
was too dense in that location for the use of such machinery), while Peruvian scientists are suggesting that the
sighting may have been the effect of ayahuasca, a hallucigen used in native ceremonies; but eyewitnesses remain
convinced of what they've seen, even writing to the National Geographic Society to ask for help. I think the length
of the animal is obviously exaggerrated, and the whole account may be a bit questionable if indeed ayahuasca was in
use by any of the eyewitnesses. The report bears an interesting parrallel to the minhocão, a legendary monster from
Brazil which burrows underground, uprooting trees and creating large trenches. The description of the minhocão is
also somewhat similar to the "giant boa" reported from Nueva Tacna. Of course, without some official

follow-up, it
is difficult to make any definite conclusions.
Sources: Anon. 1997. "Monstrous Boa Reported by Terrified Villagers." Reuter, August 20. // Anon. 1997. "It's a
Boa! It's a Bulldozer! It's a Bad Trip!" Outside vol. 22, no. 2 (November), pp. 42, 44.
-- An unidentifiable rotting "sea creature" washed ashore at Wanganui, New Zealand in early October of this year.
Photos of it bear a resemblance to the globsters (see TCR vol. 1 no. 1). It appears (from photos I have seen) to be
about 8-10 ft (2.5-3 m) long, and is whitish, covered in hairy fibers, smells terrible, and has "large, paddle-like
tentacles", according to a CNN report. Steven O'Shea and other New Zealand marine biologists are calling it the
remains of a badly decomposed sperm whale, and I would probably agree on that identity.
Source: Anon. 1997. "Mysterious sea creature washes up on New Zealand beach." http://www.cnn.com/
EARTH/9710/14/new.zealand.creature/index.html, October 14.
Thanks to: Martin Adamson, Felinda Bullock, Bob Cooksey, Andrew Gable, Bruce L. Hollihan, Darren Naish,
and Michel Raynal.

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The Cryptozoology Review
Vol. 2 No. 2 Autumn 1997
A Review of Alleged Sea Serpent Carcasses Worldwide [AD] (Part One -- 1648-1880)

By Ben S. Roesch

Occasionally, a strange and unidentified animal carcass washes up on a beach somewhere in the world. Because of
their uncertain identity, these carcasses are often stated to be actual physical evidence for the existence of sea
serpents. As we will see, however, in most cases the identity of the supposed sea serpents is much more mundane;
they often turn out to be basking sharks, whales, oarfish or some other known sea creatures. In other cases, the
nature of the beast is much more difficult to ascertain. One recurring fact in the more mysterious cases is the lack of
details; often the carcass was there, but no one bothered to take samples, no scientist ever came to examine it, and it
was eventually carried back out to sea, to re-enter the shroud of secrecy characteristic of sea serpents.
Although the actual carcasses are gone, the surviving evidence allows us to make guesses about their identity. The
goal of this article is to examine (and attempt to make conclusions on) every alleged sea serpent carcass ever reported
in the literature. The carcasses will be discussed in ascending chronological order.
I have included a listing for each carcass using the format that Bernard Heuvelmans employed for his comprehensive
listing of pre-1965 sea serpent sightings and carcasses, published in his book In the Wake of the Sea-Serpents.
Units of measurements are often a tricky subject, as the preferred format (metric or imperial) often

differs from
country to country. Metric is the best and more widely used, but many people remain more familiar with the
imperial system. For this reason, all measurements are given in both metric and imperial units. In most cases, the
original measurements of the carcass were published in imperial units, so in those cases the original imperial is
listed first, followed by the metric equivalent in parentheses. In all other cases, the metric measurement is first,
followed by the imperial measurement in parentheses.

A Beached Sea Serpent or a Beached Whale? (1648)

In his book Secret Cities of Old South America, Harold T. Wilkins quotes a report from an old Spanish manuscript,
written around 1650, which offers the earliest known record of an alleged sea serpent carcass:

In the year 1648, there appeared on the playa (beach) of Santa Maria del Mar, Oaxaca [on the Pacific coast of Mexico], a dreadful monster which, on the flood tide of the sea, was thrown up on the waves. Its bulk was great and appeared to the eye like a reef. The folk of the pueblo, 200 paces away from where it was, saw it at break of day, and were so terrified that they were on the point of quitting their houses. It moved and swayed slowly on the sands, and on the second day the motion was less. On the third day it was motionless. In eight days a bad smell arose from the huge carcase, and the folk saw birds swoop down from the sky and dogs began to eat the putrefying flesh. Convinced thereby that the monster was dead, the people plucked up courage to approach it. They found it to be 15 varas long (41.70 feet [12.7 m]), and upon the sands, it exceeded two varas (5.56 feet [1.7 m]) high. Its pelt was remarkable, of a red colour, like that of a cow. Its ears lacked folds (cangilones). It had two fore-feet [fore-flippers?], and its tail was like a pillar, being so oily greasy, and stinking so much that not even the dogs could eat it. A shoulder-blade, shaped like a fan, was jointed, and a third of a vara in diameter (around eight and a half inches [0.22 m]). Its rib was the width of an eighth (of a vara?) and two varas long (5.56 feet [1.7 m]). The tail, or caudal and

Cryptozoology Review 2 (2): 6-27.
Roesch, Ben S. 1997. "A Review of Alleged Sea Serpent Carcasses Worldwide (Part One

extremity, reached to the shoulder blade and formed very singular buttocks.

Wilkins added that a physician named Don Juan Nepomuceno verified the story, and that at one time "a bone of this
suspended from one of the windows of the library of the convent of Santo Domingo, 'facing
'sea serpent' was
cast"".

Most of the details suggest a whale identity, though the reddish skin colour is somewhat strange. Quite possibly,
however, it could have been an effect of the creature's state of decomposition, and the scavenging by birds and dogs.

It should be noted that Wilkins' book is not the most reliable source of information; most of it deals with Atlantis
and other "lost civilizations", as well as El Dorado, giants, and other myths from around the world. To make matters
worse, Wilkins' discussions are quite credulous. One review of the book written shortly after the book was published
remarked that it “contains a wealth of jumbled information and misinformation, guesses and probabilities".

Therefore, some doubt as to the veracity of the above account is warranted. If it is real, though, a whale identity
holds the most water.

1648 - Santa Maria del Mar, Oaxaca, Mexico - Inhabitants of a pueblo = Whale

Sources: Anon. 1952. "Notes and Comments." Mid-America 34: 212-213. // Wilkins, Harold T. 1952. Secret Cities
of Old South America. (New York: Library Publishers), pp. 328-329.
Three Giant Squids in 16th Century Norway? (1720, and two before 1753)
Norway is home to some of the first alleged sea serpent sightings, and it is therefore unsurprising that some of the
first alleged sea serpent carcasses originated there as well. There are few details, and the accounts are almost
impossible to verify because of their age. Their only source seems to be Erik Pontoppidan, Bishop of Bergen, one of
the first sea serpent researchers, who briefly wrote of them in his book The Natural History of Norway, which was
originally published in Norwegian in 1752 and 1753.
The first carcass was reportedly not so much a carcass of a sea serpent but its shed skin! This event took place in
1720, when an inhabitant of Kobbervueg named Thorlack Thorlacksen came across a (presumably live) "Sea-Snake"
lying in a local creek, which was connected to the nearby ocean by a narrow (about 8 ft [2.5 m]) channel. It lay there
for an entire week, and then departed, leaving a skin behind (Pontopiddan noted that "[s]ome say [the Sea-Snake]
annually sheds its skin like the Land-Snake"). Thorlacksen said he saw and handled this skin, and described it as "soft
and slimy.
The next carcass appeared at Amunds Vaagen sometime before 1753, when another "Sea-Snake" was found among
some rocks. It apparently died after being stranded on the rocks at high tide, but it is also possible that it was already
dead and the locals were simply too afraid to approach it at first. Apparently, it raised an "intolerable stench" that
lasted for some time.
The third carcass was another such "Sea Snake" and, like the one at Amunds Vaagen, it raised a terrible smell
(though this is not known for sure). It reportedly washed ashore at Karmen Island.
What are we to make of these creatures? Heuvelmans was unsure of their identity, but suggested that a giant squid
(Architeuthis spp.) may have been responsible for the Kobbervueg "skin". In retrospect, it is possible that all three
carcasses were giant squids, but if this was the case, wouldn't the carcasses have been reported as Krakens? The
legend of the Kraken onginated in Scandinavia, and it is believed it was based on the giant squid. On the other hand,
it is also possible that a real, dead (and possibly small) giant squid wouldn't inspire thoughts of the Kraken, which
was described as a huge, powerful monster of the deep.
In any case, several details suggest a giant squid identity.
--
[AD] 1648-1880)." The
First, the skin at Kobbervueg could simply have been the limp, tube-like, and gutless mantle (the "body") of a dead
giant squid, which are never in good shape when they occasionally wash up. Thorlacksen also described the skin of

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the Kobbervueg specimen as soft and slimy--attributes consistent with the flesh of a giant squid. Finally, if the
Kobbervueg "skin" really was the mantle of a giant squid, it might explain its interpretation as a "Sea Snake"
(Martin, 1997). To someone who has never seen one before, a giant squid's mantle might appear quite similar to the
shed skin of a real snake (Thorlacksen surely had seen these in his lifetime), which is hollow, reverted and tube-like.
Therefore, it would only make sense to Thorlacksen that the skin's owner must be a giant marine snake; this
conclusion would have been made casier by the traditions of such a creature living off the Norwegian coasts at the
time--the "Sea Snake".
Still, none of these points explain why locals believe the creature came ashore, and then left. Perhaps a giant squid
was washed up intact, but later lost its head to wave action. The disappearance of the creature's head may have
inspired thoughts that it had vacated its skin like a snake, and returned to the ocean.
The other detail suggesting a giant squid identity relates to the terrible smell of the carcasses at Amunds Vaagen and
Karmen Island. As most people know, the decomposition of animal flesh produces an unappealing smell, caused by
the release of butyric acid and other foul trace substances. The giant squid, however, would probably smell even
worse when rotting--thanks to the presence of ammonium ions in its flesh. These ions, derived from the giant
squids' urea (effectively rendering the squid urine-soaked), enable the cephalopod to achieve a state of neutral
buoyancy in the water. This is a useful adaptation for predation--allowing the squid to float motionless in the water
waiting for prey to come in reach of its lightning-fast tentacles--but it also gives the giant squid an unpleasant smell,
even while fresh. Combining the squids' already stinking body with the inevitable postmortem decomposition, and
the result is a truly disagreeable stench. Admittedly, the smell of ammonium is quite distinct from the smell of a
rotting animal, but there is no specific reference as to what sort of smell the carcasses radiated.
Worth noting is that a carcass of a cetacean could also easily raise an equally awful smell, thanks to the large
reserves of fat present in their bodies.
After all of this discussion of awful decomposition-related smells, one might be surprised that the reported stench of
the Norwegian carcasses may simply be a cultural motif. Many water monster stories from Norway tell of
prodigious smells arising from their rotting carcasses. One account tells of a smell that made "leaves drop from
trees." Perhaps this is a mere exaggeration, but the cultural motif explanation for the Norwegian

carcasses' terrible
smell should be seriously considered.
From the few facts given, the giant squid fits the bill of these three Norwegian carcasses fairly well, though of
course this is still a provisional identity.
1720 - Kobbervueg, Rogaland, Norway - Thorlack Thorlacksen = ?Giant squid (Architeuthis spp.)
1753 (before) - Amunds Vaagen, Nordfjord, Norway - ?=?Giant squid
1753 (before) - Karmen Island, Norway - ? = ?Giant squid
Sources: Heuvelmans, Bernard. 1968. In the Wake of the Sea-Serpents. (New York: Hill and Wang), pp. 102-103. //
Martin, Richard. 1997. Pers. comm, November 7. // Meurger, Michel with Claude Gagnon. 1986. Lake Monster
Traditions: A Cross-Cultural Analysis. (London: Fortean Tomes), p. 24. // Pontopiddan, Erik. 1753 (Trans 1755.).
The Natural History of Norway, Vol. 2. (London: A. Linde), pp. 200-202.
washed
The Stronsay Beast (Fall, 1808)
One of the more famous accounts in the history of the sea serpent is that of the Stronsay beast. This strange carcass
up at the beginning of the 19th century at Stronsay, an island in the Orkney group off northern Scotland.
Because the story has been recounted in great detail by Heuvelmans (1968), a short summary will suffice here.
Sometime in Fall (probably September or October), 1808, John Peace was fishing off Rothiesholm Point when he
noticed a large carcass, which he thought might be a whale, stranded on a nearby rocky shoal. Circling above was a
flock of noisy sea gulls, obviously interested in grabbing a free meal from the large carcass. Peace moved closer to

get a better look at the great sea creature, and found that it was like nothing he had ever seen. Ten days later he was
able to examine the carcass again; it washed up on shore, coming to rest on its belly just below the high tide mark.
Fig. 1 - An early drawing of the Stronsay beast, 1808. From Home (1809).
Peace and a couple of other locals independently measured the carcass, and each came up with a length of 55 ft (17
m). It was serpentine and had a small head attached to a 15 ft (4.6 m) long neck. Along the entire length of its back
was a long mane. The description also said that the beast had three pairs of legs, with feet bearing five or six toes
cach (Fig. 1). One of the men that had measured the carcass, a local farmer named George Sherar, managed to collect
the creature's skull and a few vertebrae, which later proved instrumental in determining its identity.
Before its true identity was revealed, however, the details of its discovery reached Patrick Neill, secretary of the
Wernerian Natural History Society. On January 14, 1809, at one of the society's meetings, Neill described the
Stronsay beast as a new genus and species--Halsydrus pontopiddani ("Pontopiddan's water snake of the sea"). At the
same meeting, one Dr. John Barclay described his examination of the beast's skull, vertebrae and one of its "legs"

(Fig. 2). He explained that the vertebrae were round and cartilaginous, and the "leg" was actually a fin. These findings
a)
b)
Fig.4.
Fig
Fig. 2 (a) Skull, (b) sternum (pectoral girdle), and (c) vertebrae of the Stronsay beast, 1808. From Barclay (1811).
caught the attention of Sir Everard Home, a distinguished naturalist at the time. He realized that the vertebrae bore a
striking resemblance to those of a basking shark (Cetorhinus maximus), a creature that he had been studying in great
detail. He also stated that the skull and the leg-cum-fin also corresponded very well with the analogous structures on

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Home's findings certainly appear to show that the Stronsay beast was really a basking shark. But what of its strange
appearance? How could it--even allowing for decomposition--transform into the bizarre form possessed by the
Stronsay beast? It is now well known that a decomposing basking shark takes on a strange, plesiosaurian-like guise-
-inspiring unfounded (but exciting) thoughts of long-thought-extinct plesiosaurs cruising elusively through the far
reaches of the oceans.
The process is quite simple for such a deceiving end result. The gills and associated structures rot off and take along
the entire lower jaw. This leaves the cervical vertebrae (still surrounded by muscle, fat and other tissues), with the
shark's small turtle-like skull on the end. As can be expected, this gives the impression of a long-necked beast with
a small head--much like a plesiosaur. At the same time that the shark's gills and lower jaw are rotting off, its
various fins are also undergoing decomposition. The rotting of the fins causes several illusions. First, when the flesh
on them rots away, the cartilaginous support system may be exposed, including the ceratotrichia, tough fibres which
are interwoven throughout the fins. This suggests hair-like growth, and may be interpreted variously as wool, hair,
feathers, fur and a mane. Second, because the backbone extends into the upper lobe only, the lower caudal lobe often
completely rots off. This leaves little trace that it was ever there. In turn, this gives the impression of a long,
serpentine creature. Lastly, the rotted pelvic and anal fins can be interpreted as legs or flippers. Also, all male sharks
have claspers (their reproductive organ), and in decomposition these could also be interpreted as legs by an observer.
The final step in the decomposition process is the basking shark's skin. In decay it may deteriorate,

leaving the
various underlying structural tissues exposed to the weather. This often causes them to fray into wispy hair-like
structures. The combination of this with the rotted fins gives the carcass a hairy or furry appearance. This does not
really contribute to the plesiosaur image, but does puzzle persons who know that the only known marine animals
with noticeable hair or fur are the pinnipeds and sea otters.
In any case, adding all these unusual outcomes of the decomposition process with the basic breakdown of all tissues,
and the outcome is a carcass quite reminiscent of a plesiosaurian form (Fig. 3). It is easy to understand how many
people have been tricked into thinking a decomposing basking shark is really a sea serpent.

there is one conflicting detail that seems to suggest a potentially cryptozoological ending to the story. This is that
the Stronsay beast was measured to be about 17 m long; no shark or fish is known to attain such lengths.
The biggest known basking shark was killed in 1851 in the Bay of Fundy (in Nova Scotia, Canada); it was a
phenomenal 12.27 m (40.26 ft) long. The largest verified basking shark was 9.8 m (32 ft) long, but most are shorter
than this. Other reports tell of basking sharks as much as 15 m (50 ft) in length, but specimens above 9.8 m are
extremely rare (Compagno, 1984). Even the maximum measured size for a whale shark (Rhincodon typus) (Fig. 4),
the largest fish in the world, is usually given as "only" 13.7 m (44.9 ft). The largest accurately measured specimen
of this planktivorous shark was 12.1 m (39.7 ft). Still, there may be gigantic whale sharks out there, as there are
reports that suggest they may grow to as much as 18 m (59 ft) (Compagno, 1984). Incidentally, it is extremely
unlikely that a whale shark could be responsible for the Stronsay beast. First, it is restricted to tropical seas. More
importantly, the skull of the whale shark is very different from that of a basking shark. Therefore, it is unlikely
Home would have identified the Stronsay beast as a basking shark if it was really a whale shark. More importantly,
the illustrations of the Stronsay beast's skull clearly depict a skull of a basking shark rather than that of a whale
shark. Finally, the branchial region of the whale shark is bridged by triangular masses of tough, spongy tissue,
suggesting that a rotted whale shark would not create the typical long neck and small head seen in rotted basking
sharks (Martin, 1997b). The basking shark really appears to be the best candidate for the Stronsay beast.
BSR 'at
Fig. 3- Above: Basking shark (Cetorhinus maximus). From Castro (1983).
Bottom: Diagrammatic outline of plesiosaurian form attained by a decomposed basking shark.
Many of the Stronsay beast's traits can be reconciled with the description given above of a rotted basking shark, but

Fig. 4 Whale shark (Rhincodon typus). From Castro (1983).

However, there is still the discrepancy between the length of the Stronsay beast and the largest verified--or even the largest reported--lengths for the basking shark. This fact has led Shuker (1995) and Heuvelmans (1968) to suggest an interesting idea: the Stronsay beast may in fact be an individual of some giant, hitherto undiscovered species of shark. While this is an appealing suggestion, a basking shark still fits the picture better than anything else (in all fairness, they also suggested the beast may just have been a monstrous basking shark). As mentioned above, there are unverified reports of basking sharks as much as 15 m (50 ft)--very close to the length of the Stronsay beast.

Also, I don't think the measurement taken of the Stronsay beast is representative of the real length the creature would have exhibited in life. As mentioned earlier, when a basking shark decomposes, the lower caudal lobe often rots away, leaving the long upper lobe on its own. The upper lobe would also suffer some decompositional damage to its structure and would probably lose at least some of the rigidity it maintained in life. In this state, the vertebrae normally held in place by the upper tail lobe would settle down and line up with the body's axis. This would create a illusional increase in the creature's length for two reasons. First, in life the basking shark's upper caudal lobe is curved, and the elimination of that curve--consistent with the settling out of the vertebrae to conform to the body's uncurved axis--would logically create an increase in length. Second, sharks are typically measured from tip of snout to the fork of the tail--but it is known that the persons who measured the Stronsay beast did so from the tip of the snout to the tip of its tail, or, rather, the tip of the upper caudal lobe. Either of these two facts could create unrealistic measurements of the Stronsay beast. Adding to this an allowance of distortion from decomposition (and possibly human error), the length of the Stronsay beast could be brought below 50 ft (15 m) and into the realm of possibility for the basking shark.

There is one final point which needs some attention. Thomas Fotheringhame, one of the eyewitnesses, reported that the beast's skin "was rough to the feeling, on drawing the hand over it, towards the head; but was smooth as velvet when the hand was drawn towards the tail" (Barclay, 1811). This is typical of sharks, which in most cases have very

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small, sharp dermal denticles embedded in their skin; the sharp points directed towards the tail. This means that if

one rubs a typical shark towards the tail, one encounters no sharp edges, and the skin feels smooth. However, if one
rubs the other way (towards the head), the skin is rough, because one is contacting the sharp edges of the denticles.
This is exactly what was observed for the Stronsay beast, but the problem is that in regards to dermal denticles,
basking sharks are not typical sharks. They have haphazardly arranged denticles; some point towards the tail, and
some point toward the head. Therefore, the skin of a basking shark is rough any direction you rub it. I'm unsure
about discarding the whole basking shark identity based on this simple observation, but it is a point worthy of
further attention (1). It is possible that the frayed tissues in the rotted skin may have given a feeling of roughness
towards the head, and smoothness towards the tail; in that case a basking shark would remain the best candidate.
There is no doubt in my mind (nor should there be in anyone's mind) that the Stronsay beast was a shark. It is my
opinion that it was a basking shark, as it explains every detail of the Stronsay beast (excepting some details of its
length, and possibly the matter of its skin's roughness), without having to invent a hypothetical new species of
giant shark. If it is a basking shark, the Stronsay beast doubtlessly represented a gigantic specimen, even allowing
for possible mismeasurements. No doubt, it is exciting to think that someone may someday have the opportunity of
watching a basking shark the size of a small baleen whale peacefully cruise by their boat--and into the record books
of zoology.
1808 (Fall) - Stronsay, Orkneys - John Peace etc. = ?Basking shark (Cetorhinus maximus)
Sources: Barclay, John. 1811. "Remarks on Some Parts of the Animal that was Cast Ashore on the Island of
Stronsa, September 1808." Memoirs of the Wernerian Natural History Society 1, pp. 418-430. // Castro, Jose I.
1983. The Sharks of North American Waters. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press). // Compagno,
Leonard J.V. 1984. FAO Species Catalogue, Vol. 4, Parts 1 and 2, Sharks of the World. (Rome: FAO). //
Heuvelmans, Bernard. 1968. In the Wake of the Sea-Serpents. (New York: Hill and Wang), pp. 117-130. // Home,
Everard. 1809. "An Anatomical Account of the Squalus maximus, etc." Philosophical Transactions of the Royal
Society 98, pp. 206-220. // Martin, Richard. 1997a. Pers. comm, October 19. // Martin, Richard. 1997b. Pers.
comm, November 8. // Shuker, Karl P.N. 1995. "Bring Me the Head of the Sea Serpent!" Strange Magazine 15
(Spring), pp. 12-17.
The Scoliophis Misadventure (September, 1817)
In 1817, a humped, snake-like sea serpent made frequent appearances off Cape Ann, Massachusetts. The Linnean
Society of New England, in an attempt to end the mystery, declared that evidence of the creature's existence must be

found. They concluded that the best target would be beaches, reasoning that the sea serpent probably came ashore to
lay its eggs, like some of the sea snakes of tropical seas (this line of thought, of course, required the belief that the
sea serpent was a reptile). If such an egg could be found, certainly the mystery could be solved. Unsurprisingly, they
found none. The thought of meeting a huge, lumbering sea serpent crawling onto a beach to lay its eggs may have
served as good inspiration for the scientists' search, but surely if sea serpents came ashore to lay eggs eggs or give
birth to live young, more land-based sightings would have been reported over the years. (Incidentally, there are very
few reports of sea serpents on land).
After these fruitless searches, the Linnean Society's hopes at being the first to describe the great sea serpent seemed
dashed. Then, in September, 1817 the Society was shown a 3 ft (1 m) long blackish snake with numerous small
bumps on its back, which had been found by two little boys playing in a field near Loblolly Cove (east of Cape
Ann). The Society hastily concluded that this creature was a young specimen of the resident sea serpent. They did
realize that the "baby sea serpent" was similar to a common North American land snake called the black racer
(Coluber constrictor), but decided that it was sufficiently different for them to name it Scoliophis atlanticus, which
means "Atlantic humped snake".
(1) Marine biologist Richard Martin (1997a) has noted to me that the blackish mucous that covers the skin of live or fresh
basking sharks might result in a slimy, smooth feeling if rubbed away from the head, despite the arrangement of denticles.
The Stronsay beast, however, was not exactly fresh, and presumedly the mucous on a basking shark would make the skin
down on exposure to air, turns black and begins to smell.
feel smooth anyway you rub it--as opposed to what was recorded for the Stronsay beast. Also, the mucous quickly breaks

Later, much to the dismay of the Society, the specimen was sent to ichthyologist Charles Alexandre Lesueur, who
examined it and revealed that it was nothing more than a deformed individual of the black racer, Scoliophis' alleged
relative.
1817 (Sept) - Cape Ann, Massachusetts, USA - ? = Black racer (Coluber constrictor)
Source: Heuvelmans, Bernard. 1968. In the Wake of the Sea-Serpents. (New York: Hill and Wang), pp. 154-155. //
Lesueur, Charles A. 1818. "Sur le serpent nommé Scoliophis: extrait d'une lettre adressée au rédacteur." Journal de
Physique, de Chimie, et d'Histoire Naturelle 86, pp. 466-469.
The Raritan Bay Basking Shark (June, 1822)
Little information is available on this carcass, but fortunately its identity is known--a basking shark. Heuvelmans

sums it up:
Charles-Alexandre Lesueur, the French zoologist, reported in 1822 that a huge sea-monster caught in Raritan Bay, New Jersey, was exhibited to the public as the "Leviathan or Wonderful Sea-Serpent" although it was really a basking shark.
Heuvelmans added that the creature on display was "[p]robably the same monster, 30 feet [9.1 m] long and about 18
feet [5.5 m] in circumference, which according to the New York papers of 15 June 1822 was shot, harpooned and
hauled ashore near Middleton Point. It had six rows of teeth and its liver yielded three barrels of oil." The description
of six rows of teeth is consistent with the basking shark, though such an observation can only result from a careful
inspection of the creature's mouth: basking sharks are planktivorous, using modified gill arches to strain out their
microscopic food, so they have extremely small, negligible teeth.
Obviously, the Raritan Bay "sea-serpent" was nothing more than a basking shark.
1822 (June) Raritan Bay, New Jersey, USA - ?= Basking shark
Sources: Heuvelmans, Bernard. 1968. In the Wake of the Sea-Serpents. (New York: Hill and Wang), p. 130.
An Oarfish at the Firth of Forth (ca. 1848)
We once again turn to Dr. Heuvelmans for the details of the story:
Around 1848 the fishing-smack Sovereign of Hull, fishing in the Firth of Forth for Lord Norbury, caught a huge serpentine fish, 'which when spread out at length on the deck, extended beyond the limits of the vessel at stem and stern.' The fishermen were not surprised at its length, for they had come across an even larger one, dark brown in color. The present fish was only from 4 to 9 inches [0.1 0.23 m] thick with a dorsal fin 7 to 8 inches [0.18 - 0.2 m] high. It was undoubtedly an oarfish, which in Scandinavia not even the dogs would eat, and Lord Norbury threw it overboard.
The creature's description as a "huge serpentine fish" immediately brings to mind an oarfish (Regalecus glesne) (Fig.
5), but I'm confused by their discovery of the larger, dark-brown specimen--which was considered to be the same
species as the smaller one. Adult oarfish are silvery and quite pale--almost transparent--but juveniles are brown in
colour (Martin, 1997). Obviously, the larger specimen couldn't be a juvenile oarfish, but it is tempting to think that
it was a juvenile of a hitherto undiscovered--and truly gigantic--species closely related to the oarfish. Or it could have
been the adult form of a similarly undiscovered member of the order Lampriformes, which is comprised of several
families, including the Trachipteridae (ribbonfishes), the Lophotidae (crestfishes), and the monospecific Regalecidae
(oarfish). In any case, if either of these hypothetical creatures existed, they would be a great deal larger than any
known lamproids, among which Regalecus is the largest, with a maximum of about 8 m (26 ft). (Unverified
claims suggest it may grow to as much as 15 m [50 ft]). There are obviously too few details in the above account to
really suggest that the dark-brown specimen was in fact a giant oarfish-like lamproid, but it remains an exciting
possibility.

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Another mystery in the above account is the length of the smaller fish caught; no mention is made of this important
fact. The only fact available was that the smack that the oarfish was measured to weighed 40 tons (41 tonnes). In his
book Leisure Time Studies (1879), Dr. Andrew Wilson (who was told of the affair by Lord Norbury) suggested the
smack was 60 feet (18 m) long and that oarfish were even longer than that on occasion. If true, this would obviously
The Cryptozoology Review
Vol. 2 No. 2 Autumn 1997
Of course, it was not a sea serpent; Edward Newman, who reprinted the account in the Zoologist, wrote that the
"creature was probably a specimen of Gordius marinus", which, as Oudemans and Heuvelmans pointed out, is a
nemertean worm now known as Lineus longissimus (European nemertine) (Fig. 6). It commonly reaches lengths of
30 mm
Fig. 5 - Oarfish (Regalecus glesne). Illustration by Richard Ellis (1996).
be a record size for the oarfish. However, Heuvelmans rebutted this statement: a 60 ft smack would weigh
considerably more than 40 tons, and his friend François Beaudouin ("an expert") thought that a 40 ton smack would
be more in the range of 35-45 ft (10.7-13.7 m). That is, of course, still a very large oarfish, and certainly the largest
ever discovered. Given the unverified accounts of 15 m oarfish, it is not too hard to believe either.
1848 (about) - Firth of Forth, Scotland - Sovereign = Oarfish (Regalecus glesne)
Sources: Ellis, Richard. 1996. Deep Atlantic. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf), pp. 283-285. // Heuvelmans, Bernard.
1968. In the wake of the Sea-Serpents. (New York: Hill and Wang), p. 85-86. // Martin, Richard. 1997. Pers.
Mifflin), pp. 118-119.
comm., November 6. // Robins, C. Richard and G. C. Ray. 1986. Atlantic Coast Fishes. (Boston: Houghton
The Worm and the Sea Serpent (1849)
In 1849, a bizarre creature alleged to be a young sea serpent was brought to the museum in Usan (Scotland) by some
local fishermen. The creature, which was still alive, was described thusly in the Montrose Standard:
> it is a living creature, more than 20 feet [6 m] in length, less than an inch in circumference, and of a dark brown chocolate colour. When at rest its body is round; but when it is handled it contracts upon itself, and assumes a flattish form. When not disturbed its motions are slow; but when taken out of the water and extended, it contracts like what a long cord of caoutchouc [rubber] would do, and folds itself up in spiral form, and soon begins to secrete a whitish mucous from the possible dimensions.
> skin, which cements the folds together, as for the purpose of binding the creature into the least
14
Fig. 6 European nemertine (Lineus longissimus). From Gibson (1994).
5-10 m (16-33 ft), and can be found in tidepools and shallow shore-waters, coiled up in a self-made knot. The

description given above is a very good one of L. longissimus, which may be chocolate brown in colour, undergoes
muscular contractions when disturbed, and produces large amounts of a sticky mucus when handled. Evidently, L.
longissimus is the creature that the Usan fishermen thought was really a baby sea serpent.
1849 Usan, Scotland - Fishermen = European nemertine (Lineus longissimus)
Sources: Gibson, Ray. 1994. Nemerteans. (London: The Linnean Society of London), pp. 92-93. // Heuvelmans,
Bernard. 1968. In the Wake of the Sea-Serpents. (New York: Hill and Wang), pp. 221-222. // Newman, Edward.
[AD] 1849. "A Young Sea-Serpent." Zoologist, p. 2395-2396.
The Cullercoats "Sea-Serpent"
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Another Oarfish (March 26, 1849)
When a strange animal was caught off Cullercoats in Northumberland (England) on March 26, 1849, the Illustrated
London News (May 19, 1849) was quick to call it a "sea-serpent". In those days (and still, arguably, today) the
newspapers seemed to have a predilection to calling reports of any strange sea creature those of the sea serpent. The
real identity of the Cullercoats creature, however, was much less dramatic--an oarfish. The animal, 12 ft 3 inches
(3.73 m) long, 11 1/4 inches (0.29 m) deep, and 2 3/4 inches (0.07 m) thick, was examined by two naturalists,
Albany Hancock and Dr. Dennis Embleton, who concluded it was a new species of oarfish. Needless to say, it was
not, since as far as I know there is still only one species of oarfish, Regalecus glesne. It is therefore probable that
Hancock and Embleton's alleged new species was never recognized as such. In any case, another supposed sea serpent
can be easily explained.
1849 (March 26) - Cullercoats, Northumberland, England - Fishermen = Oarfish
Sources: Anon. 1849. "Occurrence of a Supposed New Species of Riband Fish on the Coast off Cullercoats."
[AD] Zoologist, pp. 2460-2462. // Heuvelmans, Bernard. 1968. In the Wake of the Sea-Serpents. (New York: Hill and
Wang), p. 85, 235. // Newman, Edward. 1849. "A Strange Marine Animal." Zoologist, p. 2433.
The Monongahela's Monster (January 13, 1852)
One of the more detailed of sea serpent accounts is that of the monster allegedly harpooned and cut up by the whaling
ship Monongahela in the central Pacific in January, 1852. The captain of the boat, Charles Seabury, allegedly wrote

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The Cryptozoology Review
Vol 2 No. 2 Autumn 1997
a 2 700 word letter about the experience, which was published in numerous publications in 1852. Because I think the case can be easily resolved, I will only briefly state the particulars of the account.

On January 13, 1852, the 100 ft (30 m) Monongahela of New Bedford, Massachusetts, was sailing in latitude 3°
10'S and longitude 131° 50'W (central equatorial Pacific) when the lookout spotted a commotion in the water. To his
amazement, it was being caused by a huge serpentine creature longer than the ship, and a little less than 50 ft (15 m)
in diameter.
The crew set out in longboats to hunt the creature as if it were a whale, and managed to harpoon it. The men plunged
several harpoons into the beast's body, and it sounded. It struggled mightily for sixteen hours to get free, but finally
the lines went slack and the dead body of the giant creature appeared at the surface.
The description of the animal given by Capt. Seabury is vivid and detailed. He tells us that it was brownish-yellow
in colour, had a 10 ft (3 m) long alligator-like head with 3 inch (0.08 m) long teeth, was a male, and was 103 feet 7
inches [31.6 m] in length. The rest of his story sounds like a monstrous and somewhat distorted snake, with
descriptions of recurved teeth and a lower jaw with separable bones. There are also some mammalian traits thrown
into the mix, such as a 4 inch (10 cm)-thick layer of blubber, a pair of whale-like blowholes, and four paw-like
appendages.
The crew had hunted the creature like a whale, and now they set to work on its dead body in the same manner. They
flensed the creature of its blubber, which yielded oil "clear as water" that "burnt nearly as fast as spirits of
turpentine." They cut up the animal and preserved various parts, such as the head, heart and one of the eyes--so as to
have a record of its existence and fantastic appearance. For further corroboration, Capt. Seabury wrote up a long
report on the incident (summarized above). Then, he and his crew apparently sailed around Cape Horn, and headed
north on the Atlantic. On February 6, 1852, the ship came across the brig Gipsy, on its way from Puerto Rico to
Bridgeport, Connecticut. (Heuvelmans has noted that the Monongahela would have had to travel 17 knots [31 km/h]
night and day to cover the distance--about 16 000 km [10 000 miles]--between their position in the central Pacific
and their Atlantic meeting with the Gipsy). Capt. Seabury gave his account to the Gipsy's Captain Sturges, so that
he might notify the papers--which he did. We can only guess the reason Seabury did not also hand over the sea
serpent's head.
In true newspaper fashion, no follow-up reports were made, and neither the Monongahela nor its cargo of sea serpent
parts were heard of again. In 1959, however, Frank Edwards revealed some new facts in his book Stranger Than
Science. He wrote that there was never a ship named the Gipsy nor a Capt. Sturges who relayed Capt. Seabury's
report on to the world; instead, it was a Captain Gavitt and his ship the Rebecca Sims. Also, Seabury's first name

was Jason, not Charles. Edwards added that he had heard that many years after newspapers worldwide carried
Seabury's fantastic account, the name board of the Monongahela had been found washed up at Umnak Island in the
Aleutian Archipelago, in the north Pacific. Apparently, the ship had been destroyed in a storm and its crew lost--not
to mention alleged proof for the existence of sea serpents. Why the Monongahela would have doubled back on its
tracks and headed back towards the North Pacific, is more of a mystery than its alleged sea serpent carcass.
I need hardly say that the whole affair is obviously a hoax, as Heuvelmans stated (1968). Shuker (1995) seems to
suggest that it might really have happened after all, but I simply cannot agree. Seabury's account is totally
ridiculous--an utter hoax. The supposed anatomy of the creature is totally irreconcilable with any living species, and
the description is obviously the work of someone mixing and matching animal body parts. The Monongahela's
whirlwind tour around Cape Horn is unbelievable to say the least, and the various details offered by Frank Edwards
offer nothing. And may I remind you, quite cynically, that I'd be hard pressed to base anything on Frank Edwards'
conclusions!
In my opinion, the Monongahela's monster is nothing but an elaborately detailed (and, indeed, glorified) hoax.
1852 (Jan 13) - Latitude 3° 10'S by longitude 131° 50'W (central equatorial Pacific) - Monongahela = HOAX
Sources: Heuvelmans, Bernard. 1968. In the Wake of the Sea-Serpents. (New York: Hill and Wang), pp. 227-229. //
16
Seabury, Charles. 1852. "Capture of the Sea Serpent." Times [London], March 10. // Shuker, Karl P.N. 1995.
"Bring Me the Head of the Sea Serpent!" Strange Magazine 15 (Spring), pp. 12-17.
Yet Another Oarfish as "Sea-Serpent"
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in Bermuda (January 22, 1860)
In January, 1860, Captain Hawtaigne, R.N., sent this account of an easily identifiable "sea serpent" to the
Zoologist:
A sea-serpent in the Bermudas.
--
I beg to send you the following account of a strange sea-monster
captured on these shores, the animal being, in fact, no less than the great sea-serpent which was described as having been seen by Captain M'Quhae, of H.M.S. "Daedalus", a few years since. Two gentlemen named Trimingham were walking along the shore of Hungary Bay, in Hamilton Island, on Sunday last, about eleven o'clock, when they were attracted by a loud rushing noise in the water, and, on reaching the spot, they found a huge sea-monster, which had thrown itself on the low rocks, and was dying from exhaustion in its efforts to regain the water. They attacked it with large forks which were lying near at hand for gathering sea-weed, and unfortunately mauled it much, but secured it. The reptile was sixteen feet seven inches [5.05 m] in length, tapering from head to tail like a snake, the body being a flattish oval shape, the greatest depth at about a third of its length from the head, being eleven inches [0.28 m]. The colour was bright and silvery; the skin

destitute of scales but rough and warty; the head in shape not unlike that of a bull-dog, but it is destitute of teeth; the eyes were large, flat, and extremely brilliant, it had small pectoral fins, and minute ventral fins, and large gills. There were a series of fins running along the back, composed of short, slender rays, united by a transparent membrane, at the interval of something less than an inch [0.03 m] from each other. The creature had no bone, but a cartilage running through the body. Across the body at certain intervals were bands, where the skin was of a more flexible nature, evidently intended for the creature's locomotion, screw like, through the water. But its most remarkable feature was a series of eight long thin spines of a bright red colour springing from the top of the head and following each other at an interval of about an inch; the longest was in the centre: it is now in the possession of Colonel Munro, the acting Governor of the Colony; and I had the opportunity of examining it very closely. It is two feet seven inches [0.8 m] long, about three eighth of an inch [0.0095 m] in circumference at the base, and gradually tapering, but flattened at the extreme end, like the blade of an oar.

The creature (Fig. 7) in question is, without a doubt, an oarfish; the account is a near-perfect description of this

Fig. 7- The oarfish at Hungary Bay, Bermuda, 1860.

species. This conclusion was corroborated by naturalist J. Mathew Jones, who after examining the remains,

pronounced the creature to be an oarfish. (Edward Newman considered it a new species, but evidently, like the

Cullercoats [1849] oarfish, his proposed taxon was later synonymized with Regalecus glesne--the one and only

oarfish.)

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Sources: Hawtaigne, Captain. 1860. "A Sea-Serpent in the Bermudas." Zoologist, p. 6934. // Heuvelmans, Bernard.

1968. In the wake of the Sea-Serpents. (New York: Hill and Wang), pp. 235-236.

The Beaver Carcass

Shark or Whale? (August 2, 1863)

On August 2, 1863, the commander of the schooner Beaver, Captain Boyles, wrote an account that stands as one of

the most detailed alleged sea serpent carcass descriptions ever. On that date the Beaver was (according to the log)

anchored on the west coast of China, near Hamai, at Sungyce. (As Heuvelmans notes, China does not have a west

coast, and that the south-west coast is probably meant. "Hamai is probably what is now Amoy. Perhaps Sungyce

was on a west-facing shore of the estuary there." [p. 248]). Captain Boyle writes (as reproduced in In the Wake of the

Sea-Serpents):

Well, here I am among the Sungyce Hakkas again. I came to anchor about twelve o'clock last night, about two miles out of this harbour. At half-past four o'clock this morning I went on shore with five young Chinese. The villages that are about three miles up the river were all in an uproar. I could not make out what was wrong with them--in fact I thought it was another fight. A little while longer, I saw them dragging at something, but what it was I could not tell

When I got a
little closer ... I saw that it was a great fish of some kind. He was not dead then
There were
about 3,000 men and boys on the spot, every one with a lance, spear, knife, or chopper. More than half of these men were cutting and haggling at this monster. By the time I had been looking on, and walking round it, they managed to cut about forty feet off its tail or the small end of the monster, which is just the same as a snake's. I requested them to cut off its head, and said I would give them 500 cash to have a good look at the inside of its mouth. This was gladly accepted, while some were standing close to me as if they were out of wind at the hard work they had had with their choppers. I asked them how that fish came there. They told me that he came there at his own accord, and when on the sand made a fearful splashing and noise on the sand and water. At first every one of them were scared, until some of the fishermen ventured close to it, and called out that it was a large fish, and that it was theirs. This caused every one to run with whatever they could get to cut for himself. The fish ran on the bank at three o'clock
ONE
By this time the monster's head was cut off, but very much disfigured. I had then to draw it up the bank out of the water, and had the lower jaw cut off so as I could examine the inside of the mouth. I found the inside of the mouth to be just the same as a snake's, but it had three rows of soft teeth all as even as anything could be, and exactly the same size. They were movable, that is, I could move them towards the lip and back. At the entrance of the throat I found a strange sort of gridiron-shaped, tough substance, up and down. It was covered with a sort of reddish flesh, which causes me to think this monster of the deep lives on suckson (sic -- meaning of course, suction)(2
(2)
. The snout was flat, the check or eye-brow stuck out about two and a-half feet [0.76 m]--at least, two and a-half times the length of my boot. The skin was one and a-half inches [0.04 m] thick only, but awful tough, of a dirty blue color. I should think there must have been many tons of barnacles on this monster. Where the barnacles were taken off there was a dirty white spot to be seen. As near as possible, it was twenty seven yards long [25 m]. The head is exactly like a snake's, but the eye was very like a hog's, till it was perfectly dead. My boots not being waterproof, and the sun being very hot, I was forced to leave, or I should have remained there until it was all cut up and weighed; but this I could not do. I have no idea of his weight. I left, and went ashore at a village close to the waterside, about two miles from the spot where the monster was being cut up. Here I found some tons of it upon the rocks being cut up into great junks [sic]. They were spoiling the bones by sawing them up as they were cutting the beef, as they call it.
(2) Heuvelmans footnotes: "This parenthesis is Wilson's [the account was published in an article on sea serpents by Dr.
Andrew Wilson]. Personally I think that if this is what Boyle had meant he would have said "by" and not "on," and that in
misread." I agree with Dr. Heuvelmans on this accord.
any case this does not follow from the "gridiron". Boyle clearly meant "plankton"-- an easy enough word to forget or

Later, in his log entry for August 15, Captain Boyle wrote that he went ashore again, "but did not see any signs of
the sea-monster whatever."
So what is Captain Boyle's strange carcass? Bernard Heuvelmans suggested it might be a "huge unknown selachian'
with its lower tail lobe cut off, or perhaps a giant plankton-feeding eel.
Personally, I doubt the existence of such an eel, and though a large undiscovered species of microphagous shark is
not out of the question, I am unconvinced by the idea. The fact is, such large plankton-feeding

creatures are quite
conspicuous in habits, and, in sharks and some whales, are relatively slow-moving. An exception to the former
point is the megamouth shark (Megachasma pelagios), first described by scientists when it was trawled up in a sea-
anchor off Hawaii in 1976. The megamouth, however, is relatively small among the planktivorous whales and
sharks (3), with a maximum length of "only" about 5 m (16 ft). Also, it has turned up on beaches and nets several
more times since it was discovered.
As I mentioned, I am wary of the suggestion of a new species of gigantic, planktivorous eel, though it is conceivably within the realm of possibility. Most eels feed on plankton when in their juvenile stage, and a few
species remain planktivorous throughout their whole lives (Martin, 1997a). However, it would still be a hard to
conceptualize the existence of a gigantic, pelagic, plankton-feeding eel--especially since most eels are the complete
opposite: small, benthic predators of invertebrates and fishes. There are a few exceptions to the first two particulars,
especially in the deep sea. One such species is the black swallower (Saccopharynx harrisoni), a frightening-looking
creature with a whip-like tail and a huge mouth filled with sharp teeth (Fig.8). It grows to a formidable 2 m (6 ft). In
general, however, the eels are not as morphologically or ecologically diverse as sharks--a group that has generated
three independently-evolved filter feeders (the whale, megamouth and basking sharks).
Fig. 8 - Black swallower (Saccopharynx harrisoni). Illustration by Richard Ellis (1996).
(3) It is worth keeping in mind that the majority of plankton-feeding animals in the world are equally tiny zooplankton, as
well as--to name a few--barnacles, salps, and numerous small bony fishes.

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So, if the Beaver carcass isn't the remains of a new species of giant, pelagic eel or an equally giant and unknown
shark, what could it be? One might suggest the basking shark or whale shark, but these are much to small to fit the
25 m length given for the Beaver carcass (suggesting that a basking shark is responsible for the 17 m Stronsay beast
is radical enough!). They also do not fit the details of the Beaver animal as well as another giant group of marine
animals--the baleen whales, or mysticetes.
After discussing the matter with marine expert Richard Ellis and giving the matter some thought, I am confident that
a mysticete, with its flukes cut off by the villagers prior to Capt. Boyles' examination, provides the best match to
the Beaver carcass. There are several lines of evidence that
this solution:
suggest
(1) One of the more convincing arguments for a whale identity is this statement by Capt. Boyles: "They

were
.". Needless to say, this argues for a whale identity. Sharks do
spoiling the bones [my italics] by sawing them up..."
have bones, but they are not as well ossified or as numerous as in "bony" fishes and tetrapods (animals with two sets
of paired appendages--reptiles, amphibians, birds, and mammals). Whales, though, have typical mammalian bones--
well ossified and plentiful.
(2) The carcass reportedly had "many tons of barnacles" on it. This agrees more with mysticete whales, which are
often encrusted with large amounts of barnacles that resemble the white-coloured species commonly found in the
intertidal zone. Small numbers of barnacles have been found on sharks, but they are not the same species as found on
whales, and do not look like typical intertidal barnacles. Therefore, few people besides zoologists would know they
were actually barnacles (Martin, 1997b).
(3) The skin is described as "tough," but if it had been a basking shark (or, indeed, almost any other shark), I think
Capt. Boyles would have described the skin as "rough." Whereas whale skin is is made of slick blubber (therefore
giving a smooth feeling), shark skin is made up of dermal denticles (as discussed in the Stronsay case), which makes
the skin feel rough when one rubs a shark from tail to head (or any direction, in the case of the basking shark).
(4) The fact that the creature allegedly beached itself, and was not washed up dead, is consistent with the well known
beaching behaviour of whales. Sharks, on the other hand, rarely beach while still alive.
(5) The "soft teeth" and "gridiron-shaped" structures sound quite similar to baleen, the elongated filter-feeding
structures found in the mouths of mysticete whales.
(6) At the end of his account, Capt. Boyles wrote that the carcass was being cut up into big chunks, suggesting that
the flesh was to be eaten. This is the consistent with the high energy blubber and muscular flesh of a whale; basking
shark flesh is also high energy, but is not usually eaten because of a distinctive ammonia-like smell. However,
properly treated with soakings in water or lemon juice, basking shark flesh can be a delicacy (Martin, 1997b).
(7) While it doesn't preclude the idea of a new species of large planktivorous shark, the size of the beast (25 m) is
more consistent with the size of the large mysticetes.
(8) One of the points Heuvelmans used to support his suggestion of a large shark was its pig-like eye. Some sharks,
particularly the basking shark, have very small, beady eyes, but so do many mysticetes.
(9) The colour of the creature was described as blue; whereas many mysticetes are blue or bluish in colour, none of
the plankton-feeding sharks is such a colour. Basking sharks are brownish, whale sharks are light brown with
white specks, and the megamouth is a bluish-black. Of course, if a new species of giant microphagous shark did
exist, it could conceivably be a bluish colour.
many

We will never be able to totally verify the identity of the Beaver carcass, but I think that after examining the above
facts, a mysticete fits the Beaver carcass better than anything else.
1863 (Aug 2) - Sungyce, Fou-Kien, China - Beaver =
Mysticete (Baleen whale)
Sources: Ellis, Richard. 1994. The Book of Sharks (New York: Alfred A. Knopf). // Ellis, Richard. 1996. Deep

Atlantic. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf), pp. 222-223. // Ellis, Richard. 1997. Pers. comm., July 26. // Heuvelmans,
Pers. comm., November 6. // Martin, Richard. 1997b. Pers. comm., November 7.
Bernard. 1968. In the Wake of the Sea-Serpents. (New York: Hill and Wang), p. 247-250. // Martin, Richard. 1997a.
The St. Margaret's Bay Carcass (before 1864)
Unfortunately, I was unable to find any record of this carcass besides a listing by Heuvelmans (who does not, to my
knowledge, include any references or citations to it in his book). He listed its identity as "?". Following the trends
in alleged sea serpent carcasses, it was probably a carcass of a basking shark or whale, but further research is needed.
1864 (before) - St Margaret's Bay, Nova Scotia, Canada - A lady = ?
Source: Heuvelmans, Bernard. 1968. In the Wake of the Sea-Serpents. (New York: Hill and Wang), p. 587.
Two Oarfish
--
From England and Tasmania ([before] 1876 and 1878)
Again, we come across two oarfish that were for a short time considered sea serpents. The first, caught off
Northumberland (England) around 1875, was 13 ft 6 inches (4.1 m) long, 15 inches (0.38 m) deep (including a 3-4
inch [0.076-0.1 m] high dorsal fin) and 5 inches (0.13 m) thick. The second originated from Van Diemen's Land
(Tasmania) in 1878 and was 14 ft (4.3 m) long, 15 inches deep and 8 inches (0.2 m) thick. A New York Times
account called it a "young sea serpent", but it is obvious from the description of the creature given that it was indeed
an oarfish.
1876 (before) -Northumberland, England - ?= Oarfish
1878 Tasmania, Australia - ? = Oarfish
Source: Anon. 1878. No title. New York Times, September 27. // Heuvelmans, Bernard. 1968. In the Wake of the
Sea-Serpents. (New York: Hill and Wang), p. 85.
A Hoax in Scotland (April, 1877)
In May, 1877, the New York Times recounted a detailed story about the alleged hunting and killing of a sea serpent.
The story, which had originated a couple weeks earlier in the Glasgow News, was apparently related to the News by
a resident of Oban, Scotland, where the occurrence allegedly took place.
According to the news story, a sea serpent had been seen swimming about in the bay fronting Oban, and a bunch of

men set out in longboats to kill the beast. Rifles caused no damage to it, but the men managed to scare it towards
shore, where it became beached. It was then executed with numerous shots to the neck. It was described:
The extreme length is 101 feet [30.8 m], and the thickest part is about 25 feet [7.6 m] from the head, which is 11 feet [3.4 m] in circumference. At this part is fixed a pair of fins, which are 4 feet [1.2 m] long by nearly 7 feet [2.1 m] across at the sides. Further back is a long dorsal fin, extending for at least 12 or 13 feet [3.7 or 4 m], and 5 feet [1.5 m] high in front, tapering to 1 foot [0.3 m]. The tail is more of a flattened termination to the body proper than anything else. The eyes are very small in proportion and elongated, and gills of the length of 2 1/2 feet [0.76 m] behind. we could not ascertain if there were teeth or not.
There are no external ears; and
CO.
If one reads the entire account, it is quite obvious it is a hoax. There are simply too many ludicrous details and too
much exaggerated drama for the account to be taken seriously. It is almost as though the author of the account took
the Monongahela case (discussed above), transported it to Scotland, and changed a few details. For these reasons,
Heuvelmans and Oudemans both discounted the Oban account as a hoax, a conclusion that I readily agree with.
1877 (April) - Oban, Argyll, Scotland - ? = HOAX

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The Cryptozoology Review
Sources: Anon. 1877. "Capture of the Sea-Serpent." New York Times, May 12. // Heuvelmans, Bernard. 1968. In
the Wake of the Sea-Serpents. (New York: Hill and Wang), p. 339.
The Chalcedony's "Sea Serpent" (June 5, 1880)
On June 5, 1880, the Chalcedony was sailing off Monhegan Island, Maine. Its captain, one M.D. Ingalls, was
looking off into the vast blue expanse of the ocean when he noticed something floating upside down in the water. Its
appearance was strange enough that he thought it was the great sea serpent itself.
It was dead, and floated on the water, with its belly, of a dirty brown color, up. Its head was at least 20 feet [6.1 m] long, and about 10 feet [3 m] through at the thickest point. About midway of the body, which was, I should guess, about 40 feet [12 m] long, were two fins, of a clear white, each about 12 feet [3.7 m] in length. The body seemed to taper from the back of the head down to the size of a small log, distinct from the whale tribe, as the end had nothing that looked like a fluke. The shape of the creature's head was more like a tierce than anything I can liken it to. I have seen almost all kinds of shapes that can be found in these waters, but never saw the like of this before.
Despite Capt. Ingall's belief that the creature was not a whale, he is probably wrong on this point. As Heuvelmans
suggested, it was probably just a dead whale, floating upside down in the water. Its flukes had probably rotted off, or
Vol. 2 No. 2 Autumn 1997
like that of an eel. Its head was flat, and the upper portion extended very slightly over the small mouth

(located at the
distal end of the snout), which was equipped with sharp teeth. The creature's skin was very fine, like a shark's, and
its colouration exhibited countershading--i.e., a darkish colour on the upper half of the body, and a whitish colour on
the bottom half. Countershading is a common camouflage trait in pelagic fishes (and other animals), but the specific
dark and light colour used on top and bottom varies between species. It is usually done with different shades of blue.
In the case of Capt. Hanna's fish, the back was a "slate or fish color" and its belly was "grayish-white."
"""
Fig. 10 Captain Hanna's fish, 1880. From Heuvelmans (1968).
The creature had two small pectoral fins on the side of the body behind the head and a triangular dorsal fin at about
the same axis as the pectoral fins (but on the top of the creature, of course). It also had a fin at the end of its body
which extended around the tip of the tail. This fin (possibly the caudal fin) resembles the continuous fin (comprising the dorsal, caudal and anal fins) of an eel, but it clearly is not that as the dorsal fin is separate. There
were no anal or pelvic fins, at least none that Capt. Hanna noticed.
Capt. Hanna later discarded the creature, because he did not think at the time that it was at all interesting, and
actually saw it as "a streak of ill-luck rather than good business, having torn my nets very badly and otherwise
bothering me in my business." This is unfortunate, as it was an obviously important find. In fact, renowned
zoologist Spencer F. Baird (then the director of the U.S. Fish Commission) heard of the find and wrote to Hanna for
further details (summarized above). He also encouraged Capt. Hanna to draw a picture of the mysterious fish (Fig.
10). In September, 1880, Baird stated that it was his opinion that Capt. Hanna's fish was a new species, although its
existence could not be immediately confirmed. The identity of Capt. Hanna's fish is still a mystery today, so
unsurprisingly it has attracted cryptozoological attention.
Fig 9 - Humpback whale (Megaptera novaeangliae). From Tinker (1988).
been torn off by sharks or other scavengers. I am tempted to specifically identify the culprit as a humpback whale
Creature), but the specific identity is unimportant.
(Megaptera novaeangliae) (Fig. 9), which have very large, distinctively white pectoral fins (like the Chalcedony's
1880 (June 5) - Monhegan Island, Maine, USA - Chalcedony = Whale (probably humpback whale)
Sources: Anon. 1880. "Capt. Ingall's Story: The Dead Sea-Serpent he saw off Monhegan Island." New York Times,
Tinker, Spencer W. 1988. Whales of the World. (Leiden: E.J. Brill).
June 10. // Heuvelmans, Bernard. 1968. In the Wake of the Sea-Serpents. (New York: Hill and Wang), p. 223. //
Captain Hanna's Mysterious Fish (August, 1880)
In August, 1880, Captain S.W. Hanna (of Pemaquid, Maine) caught a 25 ft (7.6 m) long fish in his nets off New
Harbor, Maine. The dead creature was 10 inches (0.25 m) thick at the largest part, and had an elongate shape much

Fig. 11 - Frilled shark (Chlamydoselachus anguineus) From Castro (1983).
Heuvelmans, Shuker and Bright have all interpreted Captain Hanna's fish as evidence for the possible existence of an
unknown species of large, serpentine shark. Such a creature would certainly be a good candidate for numerous sea
serpent sightings. All three authors also compared the creature to the frilled shark (Chlamydoselachus anguineus).
This rare, primitive and serpentine selachian lives near the sea floor in deep waters worldwide, and grows to about 2
m [7 ft]). It possesses a terminal mouth--a mouth that opens at the tip of the snout--whereas almost all other extant
sharks have subterminal (underslung) lower jaws (Fig. 12). Since Capt. Hanna's fish also appears to have a terminal
mouth (this is, however, questionable)--and is serpentine--they suggested that it may be related to the frilled shark.

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Bright went so far as to state: "[T]here is no doubt that it was a largish relative of Chlamydoselachus." b)
The Cryptozoology Review
Vol. 2 No. 2 Autumn 1997
main opercle). This is evident when looking at many different fishes, including the king mackerel (Scomberomorus
cavalla) (which looks like it has two gill slits), the crestfish (Lophotus lacepedei), and the unicornfish (Eumecichthys fiski) (the latter two, which are closely related, appearing to have three gill slits) (Fig. 13). We must
remember there is no original mention of how many gill slits Capt. Hanna's fish had--the interpretation is that of
later authors like Heuvelmans and Shuker.
Fig 12 Underside of the head of: (a) frilled shark and (b)Carcharhinus melanopterus
Note the terminal mouth of the former, and the latter's subterminal mouth (typical of most sharks)
Redrawn from Castro (1983) and Compagno (1984) respectively Not to scale.
In fact, there is little evidence to support the idea of Capt. Hanna's fish being a shark, much less a relative of the
frilled shark. Besides its hardly diagnostic serpentine shape, Capt. Hanna's fish looks nothing like the frilled shark.
The only argument (put forward by Shuker and Heuvelmans) that seems to suggest a shark identity is that the gill
slits appear to be uncovered, a trait found in all sharks, but extremely few bony fish (see discussion below). It is,
however, much more likely that Capt. Hanna's fish is not a shark, but a bony fish, an argument with several points
of evidence to back it up.
For one, the drawing of Capt. Hanna's fish clearly shows that the fins were rayed fins. Rayed fins are composed of a
thin membrane supported by flexible spiny or soft rays (depending on the fin), which are, in turn, anchored in the
flesh by a short bone called the pterygiophore. Rayed fins are a characteristic trait of the Actinopterygii

(the rayed-fin
fishes), a class of fishes that contains almost all the so-called "bony fishes". Sharks, however, do not have rayed
fins. They do have cartilaginous rays, but they are different from the rays of actinops in several ways, and are not
visible from the outside. Shark fins are basically fleshy appendages that look much like the rest of the body, and
they also cannot be stretched out like the fins of actinops. Capt. Hanna actually said the fins of his fish were not
"stiff-pointed fins like the shark or sword-fish, but more like the side-fins of the cod or sun-fish." Capt. Hanna's
comparison to the "stiff-pointed fins" of the swordfish are probably a reference to the dorsal fin of this species, which
is stiff and cannot be folded against the body (whereas the dorsal fin, and other fins, of most actinops can).
The position of the fins also suggests Capt. Hanna's fish was a bony fish rather than a shark. First, its dorsal fin is
directly behind the head, whereas in all sharks with one dorsal fin (the frilled shark and the cow sharks (4)), it is
located far down the body, much nearer to the tail. (Even in sharks with two dorsal fins, the first dorsal fin is located
at least halfway down the body in almost all cases). Second, Capt. Hanna's fish has no pelvic fins, whereas all
sharks have paired pelvic fins (and none have any sort of continuous fin). Finally, the position of the pectoral fins is
unlike that of sharks, in which the pectorals drop down on the sides, below the body, and are larger relative to body
size (although a few squaloid sharks have fins that are almost exceptions to this rule).
The three gill slits of Capt. Hanna's fish seem to suggest something different from both sharks and bony fishes.
Most sharks have five (uncovered) gill slits (with a few species having six, and a couple seven), and most bony
fishes have a covering over their gills called the opercle, giving the appearance of only one gill slit (some fishes,
such as some deep sea anglers, have no gill slit, and water enters through a round opening behind the head called the
spiracle). I think, however, that the three gills slits in Capt. Hanna's fish are actually just one opercle, flanked by a
few markings from the pre-opercle, sub-opercle and interopercle (bones that make up the gill covering along with the
(4) There is also a questionable species called the onefin catshark (Pentanchus profundicolus), which only has one dorsal fin
near its tail. It was found off the Philippines in 1912, and has not been recorded since. It is very similar to certain members
species of Apristurus
of the catshark genus Apristurus, so some rescarchers have suggested that Pentanchus is just a freak individual of a known

b)
Fig. 13 (a) King mackerel (Scomberomorus cavalla), (b) crestfish (Lophotus lacepedei), (c) unicornfish (Eumecichthys fiski). First from Coad (1995), latter two from Robins and Ray (1986). Note the illusion of multiple gill slits caused by the various opercle bones. Not to scale.
Taking all of this evidence into hand, I think it is much more likely that Capt. Hanna's fish is a bony fish

than a
shark. Even so, it also seems quite likely it represents a new species. As far as I'm concerned, no fish fits the
description or drawing well enough to be the right match. Capt. Hanna's fish, however, does resemble some eels
(though the presence of the dorsal fin seems to preclude this designation). It also resembles the aforementioned
unicornfish (without its namesake "horn") and the crestfish, members of the crestfish family (Lophotidae)--which,
incidentally, is a lamproid family.
It is not, however, my intention to attempt to specifically identify Capt. Hanna's fish, because such an attempt is
quite useless; even identifying fish from photos is very hard. Rather, I have shown that Capt. Hanna's fish is more
likely to be a bony fish than a shark, and that it seems it represents a new species of large elongate bony fish, which
remains undiscovered.
1880 (Aug) - New Harbor, Maine, U.S.A. - Capt. S.W. Hanna = Unknown bony fish
Sources: Bright, Michael. 1989. There are Giants in the Sea. (London: Robson), pp. 185-186. // Coad, Brian. 1995.
Encyclopedia of Canadian Fishes. (Ottawa: Canadian Museum of Nature). // Compagno, Leonard J.V. 1984. FAO
Species Catalogue, Vol. 4, Parts 1 and 2, Sharks of the World. (Rome: FAO). // Castro, Jose 1. 1983. The Sharks
of North American Waters. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press). // Ellis, Richard. 1994. The Book of
Sharks (New York: Alfred A. Knopf). // Heuvelmans, Bernard. 1968. In the Wake of the Sea-Serpents. (New York:
Hill and Wang), pp. 138-140. Il Robins, C. Richard and G. C. Ray. 1986. Atlantic Coast Fishes. (Boston:
Houghton Mifflin). // Shuker, Karl P.N. 1991. "The Search for Monster Sharks." Fate 44 (3): pp. 4
25
41-49.

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A Strange Creature from British Columbia (September 22, 1880)
The New York Times of September 23, 1880 contained an item describing a strange creature, supposed to be a sea
serpent, captured a day earlier near Victoria, British Columbia (Canada):
A genuine sea serpent, 6 feet [2 m] in length, with an orthodox mane, head shaped like a panther's, and a tail whittled down to a sharp point, was brought in by Indians yesterday, they having caught it in deep water in the Straits of Deharo. Its appearance creates [sic] intense interest among savants, and old fishermen cannot place the monster. The serpent has been photographed, and the body will be preserved in spirits and sent to Ottawa for classification.
Overall, the description recalls the oarfish, which has a mane of sorts (its dorsal fin), has a pointed tail and has a
relatively flat face. This latter trait may have influenced the use of a panther's head as a comparison. Although the
oarfish has never been recorded from Canadian waters, it is possible that one was brought to British Columbian
waters by an El Niño (Martin, 1997). (The El Niño occurring at the time of publication of this article [late

1997],
has caused the appearance in colder Northeast Pacific waters of several fishes normally seen in more southerly
latitudes).
One might be tempted to say the creature was a baby Cadborosaurus (B.C.'s famous sea serpent), but this of course
requires belief in this sea serpent's existence. Also, the description is more like an oarfish than that usually given for
Cadborosaurus. Furthermore, assuming that the creature reached Ottawa and was examined by scientists, it is likely
it was nothing overly spectacular (though the discovery of an oarfish in B.C. waters should have been noteworthy),
or else more would have been made of the discovery.
One last possibility is that the creature is a member of one of the lamproid families, such as the Trachipteridae.
Trachipterids are elongate, snake-like, silvery fish that bear a strong resemblance to the oarfish, except they are
smaller in size. One species, the king-of-the-salmon (Trachipterus altivelus), grows to 1.8 m (6 ft) and is found off
Canada's Pacific coast (Fig. 14). It could be responsible for the creature caught in the Straits of Deharo.
The Cryptozoology Review
Summary Listing
Vol. 2 No. 2 Autumn 1997
Legend: Date - Location - Witness(es) - Length (meters, rounded off) = Probable Identity
1648 Santa Maria del Mar, Oaxaca, Mexico - Inhabitants of a pueblo - 13 m = Whale
1720 - Kobbervueg, Rogaland, Norway - Thorlack Thorlacksen - ? = ?Giant squid (Architeuthis spp.)
1753 (before) - Amunds Vaagen, Nordfjord, Norway - ? - ? = ?Giant squid
1753 (before) - Karmen Island, Norway - ? - ? = ?Giant squid
1808 (Fall)- Stronsay, Orkneys - John Peace etc. - 17 m = ?Basking shark (Cetorhinus maximus)
1817 (Sept) - Cape Ann, Massachusetts, USA - ? -1 m = Black racer (Coluber constrictor)
1822 (June) - Raritan Bay, New Jersey, USA - ? - ?9 m= Basking shark
1848 (about) - Firth of Forth, Scotland - Sovereign - ?11 to 14 m = Oarfish (Regalecus glesne)
1849 - Usan, Scotland - Fishermen - 6 m = European nemertine Lineus longissimus
1849 (March 26) - Cullercoats, Northumberland, England - Fishermen - 4 m = Oarfish
1852 (Jan 13) -3° 10'S by 131° 50'W (central equatorial Pacific) - Monongahela - 31 m= HOAX
1860 (Jan 22) - Hungary Bay, Bermuda - Trimingham - 5 m = Oarfish
1863 (Aug 2) - Sungyce, Fou-Kien, China - Beaver -25 m = Mysticete
1864 (before) - St Margaret's Bay, Nova Scotia, Canada - A lady - ? = ?
1876 (before) - Northumberland, England - ? - 4 m = Oarfish
1878 Tasmania, Australia - ?-4 m = Oarfish
1877 (April) - Oban, Argyll, Scotland - ? - 30 m = HOAX
1880 (June 5) - Monhegan Island, Maine, USA - Chalcedony - 12 m = Whale, prob. humpback whale
1880 (Aug) New Harbor, Maine, U.S.A. - Capt. S.W. Hanna - 8 m = Unknown bony fish
1880 (Sept 22) - Victoria, British Columbia, Canada - ? - 2 m = ?Lamproid
Acknowledgements
The completion of this article would not have been possible without the help of numerous friends and colleagues. I
would especially like to thank Richard Martin, whose knowledge, editorial skills and constant help, criticisms and
encouragement was instrumental in the production of this article. Also, many thanks to John Moore, Richard Ellis
and Darren Naish, whose comments, criticisms, resources and friendly chat also greatly enhanced every aspect of this

article's writing. I would like to dedicate this article (and the successive parts) to Bernard Heuvelmans, whose
monumental tome In the Wake of the Sea-Serpents provided the inspiration and most of the general information that
made this article possible in the first place.
Fig. 14- King-of-the-salmon (Trachipterus altivelus). From Coad (1995).
as the king-of-the-salmon) seems to be a good identity.
Without further information, it is hard to make any solid conclusions, but an oarfish (or some other lamproid, such
1880 (Sept 22) - Victoria, British Columbia, Canada - ? = ?Lamproid
Source: Anon. 1880. "An Orthodox Mane: One of the Embellishments of a Captive Sea-Serpent." New York Times,
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The Cryptozoology Review
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Further Notes on Unrecognized British Mustelids

by Darren Naish

According to Jonathan Downes' 1996 book The Smaller Mystery Carnivores of the Westcountry (1), Britain is home
to a number of presently unrecognized or supposed-extinct small mustelids. In recent months, I have quite literally
stumbled across further data on two of these; (1) British populations of the stone or beech marten (Martes foina) and;
(2) the "Stockbridge Stoat". This article is a presentation of this material and an addendum to my previously
published review of Downes' book (2).

British Beech Martens

As discussed previously (2), the beech marten is not presently thought to be a British native and there does not
appear to be any evidence that it ever was. Downes (1) drew attention to Burton's 1976 mention of supposed
Pleistocene specimens of Martes foina (3), a record that may be apocryphal but does require further checking. As is
becoming increasingly well known, and as was discussed at length by Downes (4), 19th century scholars believed
that both beech and pine (M. martes) martens lived alongside one another in the British countryside. There are several
possible explanations that may account for this belief.

One of these was alluded to by myself (5): the variability expressed in populations of British pine martens led
naturalists to assume that they were seeing more than one species. Lacking a good body of specimens for
comparative purposes, they assumed that one of these "species" must represent the continental beech marten. At least
two other possibilities have also appeared in the literature. One is that seasonal differences in the color

of the pine
marten's coat created an illusion of two native morphs, interpreted by naturalists as two different species--again, one
of which was assumed to be the beech marten.
A relatively early reference that argues this to have been the case is Frances Pitt's Wild Animals in Britain (6), first
published in 1938. Pitt also made the interesting suggestion that erythristic Polecats (Mustela putorius) were on
occasion responsible for apparent out-of-place beech marten sightings (7). However, the suggestion that seasonal
color variation is responsible for the belief in two British marten species is not entirely satisfactory. Pine martens
evidently moult from a thick, silky winter coat to a short, coarse summer one (8, 9), but it does not seem that an
accompanying color change occurs. Still, it is possible, as one has been reported for the sable (Martes zibellina) -
here at least the short summer coat is the darker one (10).
A third explanation that may account for the supposed presence of beech martens in Britain was made by L. Harrison
Matthews in his classic work British Mammals (11). Matthews was quite adamant that beech martens were not, and
have never been, British natives. He argued that cases of supposed British beech martens had in fact "arisen through
mistaken identification of faded specimens of the pine marten" (12). Such an explanation implies that people were,
Naish, Darren. 1997. "Further Notes on Unrecognized British Mustelids." The Cryptozoology Review 2 (2), pp. 28-
31.
The Cryptozoology Review
Vol. 2 No. 2 Autumn 1997
presumably, looking at taxiderm rather than live examples (the colors of living animals are not typically described as
"faded"). The fading of dark browns and blacks to light browns or tans is a problem ubiquitous to taxiderm
specimens and is sometimes capable of creating false light-colored "aberrants" of certain species. I previously noted
this situation on examining a stuffed American mink (Mustela vison) at Plymouth Museum and Art Gallery (13)
A problem with all three of these suggestions is that beech and pine martens are generally distinguished on the basis
of throat "bib" color (yellow or beige in the pine marten, white in the beech marten) (Fig. 1), rather than on overall
coat color. It is incorrect, in any case, to characterize either one of the two species as either darker or lighter than the
other, as both are highly variable.
D. NAISH 1997
Fig. 1 - (a) pine marten (Martes martes). (b) beech marten (M. foina). Note different head shapes and different
extent of light area on chest and upper arms.
Presently, there is unfortunately no way of knowing the criteria on which 19th century naturalists were identifying
their "beech martens". If they were carrying out their identifications on the basis of coat color, than any one of the

three theories
contury naturalists were distinguishing their martens on a somewhat more valid criterion - that is, by throat "bib"
color. Proving that this ever was the case would require an extremely fortuitous discovery in antiquarian English
literature. If such proof could be obtained than belief in the beech marten as a British native could be validated. Here
the matter rests for the time being.
28
29

[PAGE BREAK]

The Cryptozoology Review
The "Stockbridge Stoats"
Vol. 2 No. 2 Autumn 1997
Thanks to Downes, a collection of taxiderm specimens that I dub the "Stockbridge Stoats" has received a fair amount
(1, 14), A photo of one of these specimens adorns the cover of Downes' book (1) and photos of
of recent publicity
this specimen and one other are included within (15). The animals are mentioned, but not really discussed, in the text
(16). Downes writes that the specimen he was most familiar with--the one that appears on the cover--"appears to be
an albino ferret" (p. 96) and at no time has he, to my knowledge, made any kind of claim that the Stockbridge
animals are a new or unknown species. I have never seen any reason why these animals cannot be identified as stoat
(Mustela erminea) in their winter, or ermine, phase. They are of the right size, shape and color to be stoat and they
have the characteristic black-tipped tail. Having now examined the four specimens in person I certainly see no reason
to suspect otherwise.
Considering my interest in determining the true identity of these cryptic specimens, it was perhaps of extreme
coincidence that, in March of 1997, I was taken to Stockbridge for fieldwork (part of a Historical Geography
undergraduate course I was taking at the University of Southampton). Only when I was confronted with--in the
window of a butcher's shop (17)--three stuffed little white mustelids did I realize why the name Stockbridge had been
so familiar.
The Cryptozoology Review
Vol. 2 No. 2 Autumn 1997
person.
window display of a nearby florist. Fig. 2 is a depiction of those two Stockbridge specimens that were not figured in
Downes' book. Fig. 2b represents the specimen in the florist's window (here dubbed the "Florist specimen"). Recent
but to a local taxidermist. At the time of writing, both Downes and myself are attempting to contact this
research has revealed that the specimens in the butcher's window do not apparently belong to any
worker in the shop,

specimens are either very rare or totally unknown from southern England. This area requires further research, but at
One thing we would like to know is exactly where the Stockbridge Stoats originated from, as ermine-phase
present I have not been able to find any records of true ermine-phase stoats in southern England. Most sources
simply state that stoats turn white in the northern part of their range, but are not explicit as to whether the whole of
Great Britain is classified among this "northern part". However, Hewson and Watson (18) noted that "[i]n north-cast
Scotland most stoats turned white in winter whereas in south-west Scotland most were pied and in north-east
England few changed color". This suggests that in southern England, it would be extremely rare to find ermine-phase
stoats. If, therefore, the "Stockbridge Stoats" are of local origin, they are indeed worthy of zoological attention.
Investigation is continuing.
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A
D. NAISH '97
Fig. 2 - (a) One of the three "Stockbridge Stoats" on display in the butcher's window in Stockbridge. (b) The "Florist
specimen". Both specimens are posed among pieces of wood and moss, so their extremeties are not visible.
Having now confronted the "Stockbridge Stoats" face to face, as it were, I am convinced that they are ermine-phase
Mustela erminea. Besides the three specimens in the window of the butcher's, a fourth example was included in the

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England." Journal of Zoology 187: 55-64.

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(By which we inform you of various important matters)
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Coming Soon in TCR: Enigmatic beaked whales (by Darren Naish); further installments of a review of sea
serpent carcasses (by Ben S. Roesch); a review of the piasa (by John Moore); the case against the survival of
Carcharodon megalodon (by Ben S. Roesch); great news coverage and much more! The next issue will be out in
February.